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U.S. STATE PENNSYLVANIA DECLARES DIWALI AS OFFICIAL STATE HOLIDAY

The US state of Pennsylvania has declared the widely celebrated Hindu festival as an official holiday, Senator Nikil Saval tweeted on Thursday

SENATE PASSES HISTORIC LEGISLATION BY 50-0

"The Senate voted unanimously to recognize Diwali as an official holiday! To all Pennsylvanians who celebrate this festival of light and connection: you are seen, you are welcome, you matter," Saval said. "My legislation to recognize Diwali in Pennsylvania just passed the PA Senate 50-0. Today's vote upholds and celebrates our rich cultural diversity," Senator Rothman tweeted

THOUSANDS IN PA CELEBRATE THE FESTIVAL

- "Thousands of Pennsylvanians celebrate Diwali each year... Recognising Diwali as an official state holiday upholds and celebrates our Commonwealth's rich cultural diversity," said Rothman
- State Senator Greg Rothman and Senator Nikil Saval had introduced the legislation to make Diwali an official state holiday in February

200,000

NO. OF SOUTH ASIANS IN PENNSYLVANIA, MANY OF WHOM CELEBRATE DIWALI

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh holds talks with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu during their bilateral meeting in New Delhi on Thursday | PTI

Rajnath talks tough with his Chinese counterpart Shangfu

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

DEFENCE Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday told his Chinese counterpart General Li Shangfu that violation of existing accords has eroded the entire basis of bilateral relations, adding all issues need to be resolved in accordance with the existing agreements.

Li is in New Delhi to attend a defence ministers' meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that begins on Friday. This was the first bilateral meeting between the two defence ministers since the May 2020 stand-off in Eastern Ladakh.

"The Defence Minister categorically conveyed that development of relations between India and China is premised on prevalence of peace and tranquility at the borders," the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

All issues at the LAC need to be resolved in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and commitments, Rajnath emphasised. He reiterated that "violation of existing agreements has eroded the entire basis of bilateral relations and disengagement at the border will logically be followed with de-escalation."

Both sides had frank discussions about the developments in the India-China border areas as well as bilateral relations, the ministry added.

The India-China showdown in Eastern Ladakh began in May 2020 with a clash between Chinese and Indian soldiers at Finger 4 on the Northern Bank of the Pangong Lake. China then stationed its troops at multiple points along Eastern Ladakh, forcing the Indian Army to go for a mirror deployment in the area.

Though some disengagement happened after 17 rounds of talks between Corps Commanders of both sides, the stand-off continues at Depsang and Demchok areas. Tension along the 3,488 km long Line of Actual Control continues with clashes also at Yangtze area in Arunachal Pradesh in December last.

Earlier in the day, Rajnath had bilateral meetings with his counterparts from countries like Iran and Kazakhstan. At his meeting with Iran's Brigadier General Mohammed Reza Gharaei Ashtiyani, both sides reviewed their bilateral defence cooperation and exchanged views on regional security.

After 'venomous snake' jibe at PM, Kharge backtracks

BJP sees it as a 'turning point' ahead of May 10 Assembly polls in K'taka

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Gadag/Bengaluru

AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge addresses a rally in Gadag on Thursday

WITH less than a fortnight for the May 10 Assembly polls in Karnataka, AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge on Thursday stoked a controversy by likening Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a "venomous snake". After coming under fire from the BJP, which is likely to make it a major election issue, Kharge and his party tried to control the damage by clarifying that it was not his intention to hurt anyone.

"Beware of mistaking him (Modi). Modi means a venomous snake and if you lick it wondering whether it is poisonous or not, you are dead. If you mistook it (poison) for a good thing since it is Modi, a good man and PM, has offered it, and lick it a little bit to test it, you get laid down there itself," he stated at a public rally, campaigning for Congress candidate GS Patil at Naregal in Gadag district.

Kharge also attacked Modi in the singular as a "greedy man who is hungry for power", who "shares dais with the corrupt despite speaking about curbing corruption". "He has come to destroy the country through his ideology," he remarked.

In a politically charged atmosphere, Kharge's remarks invited strong criticism from BJP leaders, with the controversy erupting just ahead of the PM's visit to the state on Saturday, to campaign for party candidates. With the BJP's rank and file lambasting Kharge, the party gave clear indications that it would make it a major issue.

The AICC president's remarks come at a time when the Congress is trying to keep the focus on local issues, while BJP is banking on Modi's rallies to turn the tide.

"The remarks about the PM show the Congress' culture," said Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai. CONTINUED ON: P4

daCunha/AB/874

EXPRESS READ

Protest tarnishing India's image: PT Usha

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha on Thursday said grapplers lacked discipline as they hit the streets to resume their protest against WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh instead of approaching them. She also said that the protest is tarnishing the image of country | P13

'50% quota cap will go, free bus ride for K'taka women'

PRAKASH SAMAGA & DIVYA CUTINHO @ Udupi/Mangaluru

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks at a programme in Udupi on Thursday

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said that the 50% cap on reservation will be removed if UPA comes to power at the Centre after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. He announced free public transport for women if his party is voted to power in Karnataka.He made these announcements at the party rallies in Udupi and Mangaluru.

Interacting with fishermen at Uchila in Udupi, he said the 50% cap on reservation is not backed by any scientific data.

He said of the 70 most powerful bureaucrats, who decide what the union government should do, only 7% belong to OBC, Dalit, tribal and minority communities.

He criticised PM Modi for not making caste census data public. "When UPA was in power, we did the caste census and the data is available with the Centre. But it is not releasing it. Data on caste is essential to solve the problems of people. The cap of 50% reservation has to be removed as it was not fixed on the basis of any scientific studies. But the PM does not agree to do that," he said.

Rahul promised that the Congress will provide Rs 10 lakh insurance to fishermen, Rs 1 lakh interest-free loan to fisherwomen and Rs 25 diesel subsidy for 500 litres per day, if voted to power in Karnataka.

To a query on fishermen's demand for loan waiver, he said that it is up to the next chief minister to decide. Trying to woo the fishermen community, Rahul said there should be a dedicated ministry for fisheries where fishermen could get their problems solved. P5

Amid outrage, don-politician Anand Mohan walks out of jail

RAMASHANKAR @ Patna

TWO weeks after the Nitish-led government in Bihar diluted the state's Prison Manual, gangster-turned-politician Anand Mohan walked out of jail on Thursday amid protests by the family of a slain bureaucrat. The former Lok Sabha MP was serving a life sentence after being convicted in 2007 for killing an IAS officer in 1994.

On April 10, the Bihar government had amended the Prison Manual to do away with a clause that prohibited early release of those involved in killing a public servant on duty.

The Grand Alliance government apparently tweaked the prison manual to ensure early release of Anand, also a Rajput leader.

Rajputs constitute 6-8% of the state's population and are believed to have the potential to impact the poll outcome.

On Thursday, Anand walked out of Saharsa jail around 4.30 am though his release was expected at 7 am. According to sources, this was done to avoid media and assemblage of his supporters outside the jail.

In 1994, the then district magistrate of Gopalganj G Krishnaiah was beaten to death by a mob when his vehicle tried to overtake a funeral procession in Muzaffarpur district. Mohan was leading the procession.

1,000

AIR INDIA TO HIRE PILOTS

With more than 500 aircraft to join its fleet, the Tata Group-owned airline is on a hiring spree of pilots, including captains and trainers. The airline currently has more than 1,800 pilots

EVACUATION ON, 2K INDIANS IN SUDAN TAKEN TO SAFE ZONES

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

Indian nationals evacuated from violence-hit Sudan under Operation Kaveri, upon their arrival in Mumbai on Thursday | TWITTER

NEARLY 2,000 of the estimated 3,500 Indians stuck in war-torn Sudan have been brought to safe zones as part of Operation Kaveri, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said here on Thursday.

But giving a specific timeline on when all Indians would be evacuated wouldn't be realistic at present as the 72-hour ceasefire in Sudan has not been honoured a few times, he added.

"We have managed to get around 2000 Indians in the safe zone. It includes the two flights which have brought in 360 evacuated passengers to Delhi via a Saudi Airlines charter flight and 246 evacuated passengers to Mumbai on a Indian Air Force aircraft. This number also includes the Indians we have been able to get from Khartoum to Port Sudan and those who have reached Jeddah," Kwatra said.

Those evacuated till now are Indians living around volatile zones. There are many others who don't want to leave yet. It includes PIOs (Persons of Indian origin) whose families migrated to Sudan nearly a century back. The estimated PIO count in Sudan is over 1,000.

Since the Indian Embassy in Khartoum is near the airport where maximum fighting is on, its staff are operating from elsewhere.

India has received requests from other countries as well, including Sri Lanka, to evacuate their citizens. The government has assured them of help after getting Indians back home.

Arranging additional flights is a pain point as there are many countries in the evacuation queue.

The IAF's C170 J is doing sorties from Port Sudan to Jeddah — a 45-minute flight. The travel distance between Khartoum and Port Sudan is over 12 hours.

Will be double blow for K'taka without double engine govt: PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday batted for continuation of BJP rule at the Centre and in Karnataka stating that people of the state will face hardships in the absence of the party's double-engine government. He was interacting with about 50 lakh BJP workers virtually in poll-bound Karnataka.

"In the past nine years, the country received a record investment. It also benefited Karnataka because of the double-engine BJP government. If there is no double-engine government, then the state will keep fighting with the Centre for everything. Development schemes will be sabotaged and there will be a delay in land acquisition for major infrastructure projects. All this will discourage investors. In the absence of a double-engine government, people of the state will face a double blow," he said.

Replying to a question of Fakeerappa from Chitradurga on the benefits of having the double-engine government, Modi said progress doubled in states which have such governments. CONTINUED ON: P5

SC's social rights nudge for same-sex couples

SHRUTI KAKKAR @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre to find ways to accord basic social rights to same-sex couples, like opening joint bank accounts or nominating a partner in insurance policies for those in cohabitory relationships.

It, however, took the Centre's point that granting legal recognition to same-sex marriage is for Parliament to decide.

A five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud asked the Centre to come back on May 3 with its response on the social benefits that can be granted to same-sex couples even without recognising their marital status legally.

Referring to the old Privy Council principle according to which long cohabitation was itself is a presumption of marriage, the CJI said the recognition of the "right of cohabitation of same-sex couple" by the state as a fundamental right would also result in imposition of corresponding duty on the state to legally recognise social incidents of cohabitation.

"We take your point that if the court would go into the legislative arena, we'll be legislating and this is your (Centre's remit) and it is for Parliament. But what will the government do to ensure that these cohabitory relationships are recognised in terms of security, social welfare," the CJI said.

"Maybe we can act as facilitators. The relationship of the court with the government is not adversarial. We may not have the model within us and it may not be appropriate for us to devise that model. But we can certainly tell the government that look our law now has gone so far recognising such relationships," he said.

The bench asked the Centre to offer solutions after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that although the right to love, cohabit, project sexual orientation and choose a partner was a fundamental right, seeking recognition of that relationship as marriage was not a fundamental right.

QUESTION OF INCEST

Laying emphasis on the fact that an individual's sexual orientation cannot be exercised in all aspects of marriage, including degrees of prohibited relationships, the CJI said it would be very far-fetched for someone to even argue that sexual orientation was so absolute as to allow incest

C'durga cops book man for sacrificing goats in public

PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Chitradurga police have registered a First Information Report (FIR) against a man, who reportedly sacrificed three goats in full public view during Ugadi festival at Parasurampura village in Chitradurga district.

The FIR has been registered based on a complaint by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

The incident in which the accused standing in front of the three frightened goats and beheading them one after the other with a sword-like weapon has been videographed, PETA stated in a press release issued here on Thursday.

PETA quoted the Supreme Court guidelines and said animals can be slaughtered only in licensed slaughterhouses.

"The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Slaughter House) Rules, 2001 and the Food Safety Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, permit the slaughter of animals for food only in licensed slaughterhouses equipped with species-specific stunning equipment," the release said.

The FIR has been registered against the accused under Sections 3,4,5 and 6 of the Karnataka Prevention of Animal Sacrifices Act, Sections 34 and 429 of the IPC and Sections of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

WITH THIS ISSUE

CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE

INDULGE

58 PAGES, INCLUDING 24 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)